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Central Council of Cooperatives

The URD (Ustredni Rada Druzstev, Central Council of Cooperatives), is the top organization of all agricultural cooperatives in Czechoslovakia. The URD controls all agricultural and economic cooperatives, the Unified Agricultural Cooperatives, and the dairy and distilling cooperatives. It conducts audits of the accounting of individual cooperatives, analyzes their administrative methods, recruits members, and originates propaganda. The URD consists of the following departments:

1. The Unified Agricultural Cooperatives and productive agricultural co-operatives; the latter were formed from large landholdings and former estates.
2. Economic cooperatives: warehousing, dairy, distillery, and livestock.
3. Consumers' cooperatives.
4. Financial cooperatives.

The headquarters of the URD are located in Soukupovo Namesti, Prague II. Its director is the former Minister of Internal Trade Antonin Zurchal. Dr Stanislav Jirik is the manager of Department 2. He is a Communist Party member, but a comparatively decent person. The informant was employed as an official in this group.

The URD has its own personnel section, political reliability section, educational section, and propaganda section. The chief of the political reliability section is Cerovsky. In addition to him the group contains Cervek and Cerny, both ardent Communists.

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The URD employs a total of 400 persons, 20 of whom are non-Communists. Up to 1948, these employees were actual specialists in their respective fields. After February 1948, they were replaced by people who had no idea of the technical aspect of their activities. They had been given 6-month courses, after which they were made managers of various cooperatives.

The educational section conducted training for the employees of all cooperatives. These classes were held in Klanovice, lasted 14 days, and were given to Communists and non-Communists alike.

Employee morale was high, but after long-term work brigades were inaugurated, such as those to the mines, working morale was lowered.

URD officials who go into the country to conduct periodic inspections of various cooperatives were not received cordially by the agricultural populace. In fact, the informant saw some of them return to Prague in a bruised and beaten condition.

The URD also organized trips to the USSR to visit the kolkhozes. Delegates for these trips were carefully screened. Only reliable Communist Party members were selected, and not outstanding farmers as declared by the press. Even so, among this select group were found a few who expressed themselves skeptically concerning what they had been shown in the USSR. These people were jailed.

Forced Labor in General Svoboda Mine

The informant, after his conviction by the State Court, was placed in a squad of prisoners from Pankrac Prison and sent to the General Svoboda Mine in Kamenne Zehrovice.

About 250 persons worked in this mine, about 50 of whom were Sudeten Germans. There were political as well as criminal prisoners; the latter were used as informers.

Mining is done at a depth of 400 meters in three shifts. These are from 1630 to 0130, from 0130 to 1000, and from 1000 to 1630. The night shift consists of older people with lower productivity.

Two detachments of the Prisoner Guard Corps are stationed at this camp. The chief of these detachments is Karlovsky, a former barber about 36 years old. He is a sadist and an evil person. Second in command is Cerny. When the prisoners are at work, he loves to strew their belongings about and throw their mail away.

The camp is guarded by the Mine Militia. Mail is received only once a month. Prisoners were permitted visitors according to the degree of punishment. The first visit could be made no sooner than 14 days after incarceration. These visits were limited to 15 minutes, with a guard present the entire time. No food or cigarettes could be given to the prisoners.

Work continued without interruption and only every other Sunday was free. Safety provisions in the mine were so poor that accidents were frequent. A student of natural sciences acted as physician; he prescribed aspirin for everything. Only those who had fevers were excused from work.

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In February 1951, two prisoners managed to escape wearing civilian clothing brought in by brigade workers. After working with this brigade they were able to leave with the brigade workers.

These brigade workers are useful to the prisoners in many ways. They bring news, especially that obtained from foreign broadcasts. This helps to maintain the morale of the prisoners in spite of their hardships.

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